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ABSTRACT

Although a large body of research has investigated the possibility of motivational or attitudinal differences in men and women that would explain observable differences in levels of achievement, much of this research has failed to produce results. The failure of researchers to consider the characteristics of their college-student samples may have contributed to this lack of results. Some of the relevant variables include those provided by the context of the typical laboratory experiment. Other context cues emerge from an analysis of the life stage of the typical research subject. This paper focuses on context limitations inherent in the use of undergraduate psychology students as research subjects in traditional laboratory experiments. It is argued that the purposeful ignoring of context effects within this paradigm has hindered the ability to answer questions about gender effects and to develop theories of gender differences. Major examples discussed include research on gender differences in achievement motives and lack of gender effects in the achievement area. It is claimed that motivational theories were given up too quickly when they were not predictive of gender effects in areas relating to male-female relations and traditional female role activities. A social context framework is applied to show why gender differences are not found in these studies.
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ADDING CONTEXT TO THE STUDY OF GENDER: CONSIDERING THE SELF-CONTEXT OF THE COLLEGE STUDENT

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Carolyn Wood Sherif award lecture, presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Boston, August 1990. This award is given annually by Division 35 (Psychology of Women) of the American Psychological Association in recognition of the recipient's Research, Teaching and Mentoring, and Leadership.

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ADDING CONTEXT TO THE STUDY OF GENDER: CONSIDERING THE SELF-CONTEXT OF THE COLLEGE STUDENT

Abstract

Although a large body of research has investigated the possibility of motivational or attitudinal differences in men and women that would explain observable differences in levels of achievement, much of this research has failed to produce results. It is proposed that the failure of researchers to consider the characteristics of their college-student samples may have contributed to this lack of results. Some of the relevant variables include those provided by the context of the typical laboratory experiment. Other context cues emerge from an analysis of the life stage of the typical research subject. Predictions about achievement differences across the life span are presented. This same analysis is also applied to other areas of gender research.

ADDING CONTEXT TO THE STUDY OF GENDER: CONSIDERING THE SELF-CONTEXT OF THE COLLEGE STUDENT

Introduction

First, I want to express my deep sense of honor at receiving this award and being here today. Carolyn was a very special person to me and to many of us here in this room today. I am grateful for this opportunity to honor her memory. I also want to thank publically my former students Maureen McHugh and Suzanna Rose for their efforts on my behalf and for the many kind things they have said over the years about our former student-professor relationships and our current colleagual relationships. It is a wonderful experience to help to train people like these whose creativity and professional insights add so much to one's own thinking and who then become life-long valued friends. I would also like to thank Josephine Olson, Esther Sales, Margaret Signorella, and Christine Smith for their insightful suggestions on an earlier version of this paper.

The topic of my talk today grows out of observations I have made about traditional, laboratory-based research over many years. This seemed like a wonderful opportunity to pull these ideas together and share them with others.

ADDING CONTEXT TO THE STUDY OF GENDER: CONSIDERING THE SELF-CONTEXT OF THE COLLEGE STUDENT

The topic of my presentation is one that concerned Carolyn Sherif. She often argued that one cannot understand gender (or any other variable) outside of the social context in which it functions (e.g., Sherif, 1979). An excellent example of this approach is her textbook on social psychology (Sherif, 1976), where her personal observations about the research add an unusual and fascinating dimension to an otherwise standard textbook.

Context has become an increasingly popular topic among social psychologists. Although it can have widely varying meanings, the word "context" appears in the title of numerous recent articles in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. It is also frequently seen in the titles of sessions here at this conference. The issue of context is also one that many of my fellow feminist psychologists have identified as important (e.g., Parlee, 1979). In fact, there was a Division 35 poster session this morning entitled "Women, Gender Roles, and Context: Timely Topics". Kay Deaux and Brenda Major (1987) have written a comprehensive and thought-provoking review called "Putting Gender into Context". Alice Eagly (1987) deals extensively with the question of contextual variables in her book Sex differences in social behavior: A social-role interpretation. The role of the societal context in understanding male and female experiences is also an implicit theme in Unger's (1979) excellent textbook as it is in many other psychology of gender and psychology of women textbooks. Thus, it is with some hesitation that I attempt to again address the question of gender and context.

Rather than attempt to review and discuss all of the many significant context variables, I have decided to focus on the context limitations inherent in the use of undergraduate psychology students as research subjects in traditional laboratory experiments. I will argue that the purposeful ignoring of context effects within this paradigm has hindered our ability to answer questions about gender effects and develop theories of gender differences. Major examples that will be discussed are research on gender differences in achievement motives and the lack of gender effects in the achievement area. I will argue that we were too quick to give up our motivational theories when they were not predictive of gender differences in the laboratory. I will also contrast this work with other research showing stronger gender effects in areas relating to male-female relations and traditional female role activities. Again, a social context framework is applied to show why we do get gender differences in these studies.

Implicit Context in the Traditional Laboratory Study

Social psychologists and other experimental psychologists have developed a model of the ideal form of controlled scientific research methodology--the laboratory study. Within this model, attempts are made to remove as many context cues as possible from the environment and from the stimuli given to the study participants. It is assumed that by minimizing interactions between research participants and between the participants and the experimenter, by concealing the true purpose of the study, and by using standardized procedures, objectivity is gained (McHugh, Koeske, & Frieze, 1986).

Research subjects are asked to come individually or in small groups to a "laboratory". Typically, this is a small room that is sparsely furnished, yielding no cues about the values or beliefs of the experimenter. Subjects are then asked to perform some task. Often this task is an unusual one that subjects would be unlikely to encounter in their daily lives, although it may resemble something they would normally do. Often, it not clear what they are "really" expected to do, and there are few cues in the situation to help them clarify this. There is often suspicion about possible deception (Schultz, 1969). It has also been suggested that the typical laboratory tends to cue achievement-oriented behavior (Hilton, 1990; Stewart & Chester, 1982).

As McHugh et al argue, such procedures may tend to elicit conventional or accepted behavior with little self-involvement. Another possibility is that in such a situation, subjects may redefine the task they are given so that it "makes sense" to them. As Funder (1987) has pointed out, this redefinition of the task may explain some of the apparent "mistakes and errors" that subjects make when asked to make judgments. Such redefinitions may also help us to clarify ambiguous experimenter effects found in various studies or experimenter demand effects. Although the notion that people project their own motives and concerns into an ambiguous situation is hardly new (e.g., McClelland et al, 1953), it is an idea that we have largely ignored in the last two decades of achievement research.

Who are the Subjects in the Traditional Laboratory Study? Within this paradigm of traditional laboratory research, subjects are typically drawn from students in introductory psychology classes who are required to participate in a certain number of experiment hours. In some cases, attempts are made to have equal numbers of male and female subjects or subjects are required to be one sex or the other. If one sex is used, it is often male (Prescott, 1978). In other cases, no control of or reporting is made of the sex of the study participants.

The subjects are met by a relatively young experimenter. This may be a more advanced undergraduate or a graduate student. In either case, the experimenter is usually a white, middle class individual under the age of 30. These demographics also describe the typical research subject, although this person is often even younger--the modal age being 19.

Sears (1986) has argued that this experimental paradigm with its laboratory setting and use of college sophomores as research subjects that has characterized the field since the 1960's, has biased our view of human nature. According to Sears, college students have less-crystallized attitudes, less-formulated senses of the self, stronger cognitive skills, stronger tendencies to comply with authority, and more unstable peer-group relationships than older adults.

Adding the Self-Context to Laboratory Research. In trying to make sense of a laboratory experiment, study participants may well (re)interpret the task that they have been given in terms of their own experiences and values. A number of theoretical models of goals, values, and the self have been proposed in the last few years (e.g., Pervin, 1989). Some that may be especially fruitful in understanding the study participant's self-context are Carlson's (1981) ideas about nuclear scripts or self-defining events in people's lives and Cantor and her colleagues' notion of "life tasks". Other related concepts include Vallacher & Wegner's (1985) ascriptive themes and Shank & Ableson's (1977) scripts, plans, goals, and life themes.

Cantor, Norem, Niedenthal, Langston and Brower (1987) have shown that college students may approach their daily lives very differently depending on what they define as the important tasks for themselves now in their lives.

> "Life tasks are the consciously accessible goals that people care about at a given point in time...They are important, affectively charged, and self-relevant concerns that people are working on in their lives. Life tasks represent the hopes and dreams of the individual, reflecting a personal history and a way of seeing the world" (Zirkel & Cantor, 1990, p. 172).

For one student, the salient life task may be finding a spouse; for another student, it may be doing well in required classes so that she can get into medical school and, ultimately, be a successful doctor. For yet another student, having a good time now before taking on the responsibilities of adulthood may be the most important life task.

Each of these hypothetical students may react differently if asked to be an experimental subject in a psychologist's laboratory. If asked to make a series of complex judgments about the likelihood of different events given some statistical information, the second student may work very hard to do this task "correctly", using advanced probability theory, especially if she felt that this was a test of her ability. But,

what if the life task were finding a spouse? Here, we might expect sex differences. If a female student was the one wanting to find a mate, and if she believed that men did not like brainy women, she might purposefully make "mistakes" on that task. For students oriented to having fun, there would be little effort to do the task carefully, and perhaps an effort to get done as fast as possible so that they could get back to more pleasant activities.

This reasoning suggests that people provide their own "self-context" to a situation on the basis of their self-concepts and the salient life tasks. We would expect this tendency to be maximized in settings with little natural context--such as the psychology laboratory. In the remainder of this talk, I will explore how such self-applied contexts might affect the types of data we would obtain in laboratory experiments. I will also argue that we can make some predictions about some of the most typical salient life tasks for the typical psychological research subject and for adults at different life stages.

Self-Contexts of Typical Undergraduate Students

In order to better understand our typical research participants, it is helpful to place them in a life-cycle perspective. Sales (1978) has discussed Neugarten's concept of the social clock as a way of conceptualizing the life events experienced by adult members of our culture (see Table 1). At each age, we expect certain events to happen to ourselves and to those around us. These expected life events and important concerns and problems that accompany them vary for women and men. They are also affected by social class and ethnicity. But, since the typical research participant is of European descent, and middle or upper-middle class, it is the social clock for this group that we will focus on today.

Insert Table 1 about here

In their early 20's, young adults tend to be moving away from psychological and economic dependence on their parents to independence. It is also a period when one begins to think seriously about the type of person one wants to be as an adult (Sales, 1978). Thus, we might expect people in this age group to over-emphasize their independence.

There may also be some special concerns for young women in this age group. At least through the early 1970's, girls were taught that their choice of a husband would be a major determinant of their future life (Angrist & Almquist, 1975). But, this seems to have changed. Most college women today (and probably since the mid-1970's) are highly career oriented (e.g., Murrell, Frieze, & Frost, in press). For these women, the life tasks may be more similar to those of their male counterparts. And, is very likely that such women are overrepresented in the typical psychology study!

Following this line of logic, we might make certain predictions about the self-context for the typical research subject. Cantor and her colleagues have provided us with data that will help us to answer this question with a sample of University of Michigan college students. Many of them are from the Honors Program. In this very interesting work, Cantor et al (1987; Zirkel & Cantor, 1990) list three major life tasks for this group: (1) succeeding academically, (2) making friends, and (3) learning to live independently away from one's family. Both sexes report having such life tasks, and, although not reported specifically, there appear to be few gender differences in the importance ratings of these tasks.

Although Cantor et al's findings are very provocative, they are by their very nature limited. After all, this is largely a study of honors students at an elite institution. What other types of life tasks might be especially important for poor, non-scholarship students at another institution? Such students may be more concerned with getting by in school as fast and as easily as they can so that they can get done and get a high paying job. Others might be concerned with supporting themselves and/or other family members and wondering if they will be able to continue in college until graduation. Within any educational institution, there may also be systematic differences in the students across various majors.

Studies of Gender Differences in Achievement

Along with the more general issue of stereotyping and prejudice, one of the questions that has generated the most research in the recent (since the mid-1960s) revival of femininst psychology was why women do not achieve at the same level as men in our society. In the 1960s and 1970's, it was clear to all of us that men occupied the highest positions in every organization and that the large majority of high paying jobs were held by men. Many of us had great difficulty naming women of eminence or achievement in their own right--and not because of their fathers, husbands, lovers, or sons. [Of course, we now have books such as Raven & Weir's (1981) Women of Achievement and O'Connell and Russo's Models of Achievement].

A number of theories were advanced to explain the lower levels of female achievement in the workplace and the wider world. These theories included women's having lower levels of achievement motivation (e.g., McClelland et al, 1953); being afraid of success (Horner, 1972); channeling achievement motivations into activities other than careers (Stein & Bailey, 1973); or having destructive patterns for attributing the causes of their successes and failures (Deaux, 1972; Frieze, 1975). A more complete review of this research can be found in Frieze et al. (1978).

A great deal of effort went into demonstrating the validity of these theories. They engaged the attention of scores of young researchers as well as older, more experienced scholars. But, the reality was that most studies failed to find the predicted sex differences. As a reviewer for a number of academic journals, I saw many such unsuccessful attempts to document the postulated sex differences in attributions for success and failure. Becoming increasingly frustrated with this state of affairs, I asked Phyllis Katz, the editor of Sex Roles if I could do a special issue on this topic to publicize the widespread failure of these theories. With co-editors, Maureen McHugh and Barbara Hanusa, we published that special issue in 1982. Studies of gender differences in achievement attributions did diminish after that time, so the intent of the special issue appears to have been met at least to some degree.

Why were all of these very interesting and appealing theories so impossible to empirically support? There were two major types of answers. One was that we needed to more carefully consider the context (or, as we described it then, the "situational effects"). Much research was generated on variables such as the type of instructions given or the stimuli used to generate motivation scores (reviewed in Stewart & Chester, 1982) and the types of achievement tasks given subjects (reviewed in McHugh, Frieze, & Hanusa, 1982). Although these variables were clearly important, the results of this research continued to yield mixed conclusions and suggested the need for even finer-grained analyses. Many researchers appeared to give up in frustration with the increasing complexity of this work.

At the time, many of us assumed that perhaps the answer lay not in motivational deficiencies in women themselves, but in the external barriers that women had to face in achieving in their work roles. We blamed ourselves for engaging in "victim-blaming". In support of the importance of the external barriers, researchers were able to document that there was discrimination in the workplace as well as within schools and other institutions. Women in their late 20's and older also had greater family responsibilities than men that made it difficult for them to give the full attention to their work that was possible for men (Frieze, et al., 1978).

Now, in 1990, we can still point to the many external barriers faced by women. At the same time, some women are managing to overcome such barriers and to achieve positions that we would not have believed possible 20 years ago. Other women are opting out of the "achievement race" and asking for a "Mommy Track" or deciding not to even try to work at demanding professions. How can we explain such differences? Looking only at the external barriers cannot help us to understand the differences in these types of women. Perhaps we were too hasty at abandoning the motivational explanations?

Let's look back at the young women who participated in those studies in the 1970's. That was a period of optimism for women. Most young college women reported wanting careers (and marriage and a family--they wanted to have it all). But, for the 19 year old psychology student of either sex, the major life task was probably finding a good job and preparing for a career. Thus, there was little difference in the 1970's in the orientations of male and female college students at that point in their lives. I suspect that that is still true today. But, what if we looked at older adults. In their mid-twenties, our social clock says that it is time to think about forming a long term relationship and to enter into one's chosen career. Marriages take place in the mid and late twenties for college-educated populations. Sales (1978) found that the social clock also calls for couples to have children in their twenties, but there is a good deal of evidence that in the last 10 to 15 years such couples have been delaying children. In a study of women with masters' degrees in business or library science, we (Olson, Frieze, & Detlefsen, in press) found that although the women had married in their twenties, many had delayed having children well into their thirties. We suspect that some have waited too long, and even though they reported wanting to have children, a significant proportion never will.

We might expect that as women enter the ages when they have traditionally had children, the life task of mother will become more salient for them. Our data (and other work) suggests that many women will have great difficulty combining the demands of careers in areas such as business management with the needs of young children (Olson, Frieze, & Detlefsen, in press; Ruggiero & Weston, 1988). But, it may be only after they have been on the job for some time that they realize this. Thus, it is in the late 20's and 30's that we would expect women from the group we have been discussing to diverge from each other (and from men) in their life tasks or values.

We can also make some predictions about the self-context for older adults. As we follow women through their social clocks, into the ages of the 40's and 50's, if they have had children, these children are now likely to be grown. Thus, once again, we would expect more similarities than differences among women and between women and men as work again assumes a central role (whether paid or unpaid) in women's lives. For men, it may be in the 40's and 50's that they begin for the first time to have serious differences in life-contexts among them. For men, it is in their middle-aged years that the social clock calls for a re-examination of past achievements and a now-or-never concern (Sales, 1978). Before this time, all men were channeled into the same type of activities that put work first. Now, other life tasks may become important. Some men may want to enjoy life more and others may want to express creative aspects of themselves. For others, the major life task is demonstrating to oneself and to the world that they are not getting older and can still be sexually attractive to young women. Still other life concerns will arise as women and men enter the post-retirement years.

Returning to the typical laboratory study subject, many of these college students are very work oriented. Both the laboratory environment and the times create a strong career orientation in both sexes in the college years. The women who graduated from college in the late 1960's and 1970's are now established in the workforce. The importance of work for these women is demonstrated by a meta-analysis of studies of the relationship between life satisfaction and job satisfaction (Tait, Padgett, & Baldwin, 1989). In this study, Tait et al reported significant correlations for both men and women in studies published since 1974. But, there was no consistent relationship for work satisfaction to relate to one's satisfaction with life for women in studies before 1974. They conclude that since 1974, "it seems likely that for many women, their identities are no longer defined exclusively by their homes and families but also by their jobs" (p. 505). Unfortunately, Tait et al did not analyze for the age of the study participants in the various studies, nor did they separate the college educated from others. So, this data

must be seen as only suggestive. Also, as Tait et al point out, even in the more recent studies of adult women, the correlation of .31 indicates that job satisfaction accounts for only a small proportion of variance in life satisfaction. There is a similar correlation for men. Thus, it may well be that there are wide individual differences in both sexes with some being more concerned with work than others. Some of these life-context differences may also relate to life stage.

Our motivational theories and measures of achievement may well be more predictive for women in their late 20's and 30's than for those younger or older. But, the usefulness of these theories may not be to demonstrate differences in men and women, but to better understand the life-context of different women (and men).

As Sherif (1980) reminded us a decade ago, different aspects of the self become salient in different situations. The self-context changes in predictable ways at different life stages. Some of the possible effects are outlined in Table 2. Further discussion of the implications of this type of analysis will be done after we examine another important area for the self-context of college students.

Insert Table 2 about here

Studies of Male-Female Relationships

Unlike the body of work on achievement, gender differences have continued to characterize the research on male-female relationships. Numerous examples can be cited of significant effects for college student samples. The sexes differ in how likely they are to help another student in need (Eagly, 1987). Although gender effects have diminished over the twentienth century, we continue to find differences in sexual behaviors of men and women both of college and older ages (e.g., Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Klassen, Williams & Levitt, 1989). Hendrick and Hendrick (1986) have shown that college-aged men and women look for different things in love relationships. Buss and Barnes (1986) and Sprecher (1989) have documented that men still value attractiveness in their partners more than women.

How do we explain this? Perhaps by looking at the life-context of the research participants in these studies, we can better understand why differences exist here, but not in the achievement studies? Considering again the typical life tasks of college students, these are the years when the sexes are most interested in one another. One of the life tasks of the young adult of either sex is to begin to identify the characteristics of the person one wants to ultimately marry. Much time and emotional energy is spent in "dating" or social interactions between the sexes. Both sexes want to be attractive and to act in ways that are appealing to the other sex.

As Peplau (1983) has described in detail, our culture provides blueprints for male-female interactions. When we asked students about a typical "first date", they were readily able to describe the first date script and there was high consistency in their perceptions (Rose & Frieze, 1989). And, although both sexes were similar in how they viewed the roles of men and women in the dating script, both sexes also agreed that men and women do act differently on this first date. This is consistent with other work showing that gender roles are most salient when the other sex is present, especially for young adults (e.g., Jay, 1980; Mayo & Henley, 1981; Signorella & Frieze, 1990). When asked specifically what they did to make themselves more attractive to members of the opposite sex, Buss (1988) reported that students

were quite stereotypic in their responses. Males were more likely than females to brag about their resources and to show off their strength and athletic abilities. Females, more than males, did a number of acts intended to enhance their physical appearances. Women also more often reported being nice.

These data suggest that when the self-context involves making oneself desirable to the other sex, gender effects are heightened. It is also in such situations that gender schemata may be activated (Deaux & Major, 1987). But, once again, different patterns may exist in later life stages. After the late teens and early 20's, most people have married or decided not to. At this point, their relationships become more same-sex oriented. Women's friendships are primarily with other women, continuing the pattern of same-sex friends that characterized their childhoods. Similarly, men also have same sex friends through most of their adult years (Maccoby, in press).

These life stage patterns would lead one to expect that male-female relationships would change in nature as people marry. Within marriage, there should be more emphasis on communication and less on sex-stereotypic styles of interaction. However, for traditional women who devote themselves exclusively to the roles of wife and mother, gender differences in interaction styles might persist. For women more involved in work roles, some of the earlier identified gender differences should diminish.

Predicting Achievement Behavior as a Function of Life Stage

Now that we have examined the typical self-context for women and men of different ages, we can again return to the issue of how this type of analysis might help us to better study the achievement behavior of both sexes. Looking first at the young adulthood stage, the life context relating to achievement is similar for men and women and the sexes should be relatively homogenous. We should not expect gender differences in studies of classroom or laboratory achievement since the self-context is quite similar for women and men. It is also assumed that the overall level of achievement orientation for college students in most psychology studies is so high that the motivational variables will explain little, if any, variance. But, as students widen their self-context by looking ahead to their future years, we might be able to use motivational variables to predict behavior (see Table 3).

Insert Table 3 about here

Many studies have demonstrated a relationship between achievement motivation and career choice (Stewart & Chester, 1982). Based on a review of previous research, Jenkins (1987) outlines several conditions under which achievement motivation should predict performance:

> "(a) when success involves ego-engaging tasks of moderate difficulty (challenge); (b) when working conditions are independent, with personal responsibility for outcomes (autonomy); and (c) when rapid performance feedback is available." (p. 923).

As Jenkins points out, structural factors determine when such conditions exist in the workplace for women (or men).

For women graduating from college in 1967, Jenkins (1987) found that those with high levels of achievement motivation chose teaching as a career, although many of them were not satisfied with their teaching jobs 14 years later. Now, with greater options available for women, it appears that high levels of achievement motivation predict the choice of a career in a male-dominated profession rather than the traditional female professions (such as teaching) (Murrell et al, in press; Ruggiero & Weston, 1988).

In addition to predictions based on level of achievement orientation, other motivational variables might relate to the more specific demands of the career selected. A number of researchers have identified different types of achievement orientation, some of which are more individualistic than others (e.g., Eccles, 1987; Lipman-Blumen et al., 1980; Spence & Helmreich, 1983). Such conceptualizations might also affect the specific work behaviors engaged in by the person later in their life. Other formulations of achievement would be expected to predict which women would leave the labor force in their late 20's or 30's, which would attempt to follow a "Mommy Track" while still participating in work activities, and which would remain fully engaged in work roles.

To summarize, the self-context varies according to life stage and gender. Gender identity and gender role activities would be expected to be more salient at some times than others in the lives of women and men (Deaux, 1988). To understand the choices and behaviors of women, we must ask questions such as "what identities are important to women?" The answers to this question will involve the current self-context. They may also include plans for future roles or dreams (Deaux, 1988), depending on the questions we ask. Such idiographic analyses are essential, though, for the development of our understanding (Paludi & Frankell-Hauser, 1986).

Other Context Effects in Gender Research

It is interesting to analyze other areas of gender research that may also be affected by the laboratory context. Studies of judgments of others have often shown stronger sex/gender effects than studies testing for differences in male and female subjects. Gender stereotypes continue to be documented in the laboratory, although the effects are often weak (Eagly, 1987). One reason for this may be that in judging others, it is not as easy to apply one's own self-context. Instead, students in such studies are forced to rely on the minimal cues that are available in the situation. By holding age, race, socioeconomic status, and student status constant, gender becomes one of the only bases for differentiation (Eagly, 1987; Parlee, 1979; Sherif, 1979). In my own work, I have found that given hypothetical stimulus persons to judge, subjects will use all information they are given, even if it is logically irrelevant (Frieze, 1973). Eagly (1987) has also shown that if subjects are given information about the work roles of people, this information may be more potent than simple gender stereotypes in making judgments.

Such (lack of) context effects may help to explain the fact that data about the judgments of other people so often show gender effects. Examples of this include research on stereotypes of males and females and of attributions for the successes and failures of others. In the attribution area, the sex of target effects have always been more consistent than those for subject gender.

Another way in which we will need to carefully consider the self context is in cross-cultural studies. Such research becomes ever more important as we move more fully into a global environment. I was privileged to be able to participate as a faculty member on a Semester at Sea Program where we taught courses to college students as we sailed around the world. One of my courses was The Psychology of Gender. In preparing for this course, it became obvious how much variables such as economic status and religion affect the course of women's lives. I suspect that such variables might be more important than many of us have ever realized, even in studies of our own culture.

As we look at other cultures, the cultural self-context is more clearly seen. By seeing other ways of viewing the world, our own assumptions are clarified. Our society may also be one in which the self-context is of particularly great importance. Our society is one that values freedom of choice. And, our wealth, relative to other parts of the world, allows us to exercise these choices. Contrast this with China where a highly prized value is willingness to sacrifice for the benefit of society. In such a society, it has been possible to create 90% compliance with the one child policy, at least in areas where there are not other, conflicting, values (Falbo, 1990). It is rare in our society for 90% of the population to agree with

anything, much less to rearrange their lives to comply with this belief.

As this review as well as other discussions of context have pointed out, one really cannot separate gender from the social context. It is impossible to understand or study women (or men) without first locating them in a class, ethnic group, neighborhood, and family (Sherif, 1980). Such variables are complex and have largely been ignored by psychologists. But, we now know enough that we should be able to move on and incorporate such factors. As our knowledge of any variable grows, we inevitably move from studies of main effects to studies of interactions or to multivariate research designs. This makes the task of the researcher more challenging, but also, potentially more exciting and meaningful.

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Table 1

SOCIAL CLOCK FOR THE COLLEGE EDUCATED

Young Adulthood: (18-24)

- Develop independence from one's family
- Explore work options
- Explore marriage options

Role Completion: (25-29) >>> (25-39)

- Increasing work involvement
- Marriage
- Parenthood
- Same-sex friendships

Mid-Life Crisis: (44-47) >>> (40's and 50's)

- Children are grown and leave the home
- Clear signs of physical aging. Menopause for women and decline in sexual potency for men.
- Continued work involvement or change in careers

Mellowing: (48-60) >> (late 40's-70's)

- Career peaks. Begin disengagement from work.
- Marriage becomes more companionate
- Children are independent adults. Grandparenthood.
- Parents become debilitated or die.

Table 2

SOCIAL CLOCK FOR THE COLLEGE EDUCATED

Implications for the Self-Context

Young Adulthood: (18-24)

- Concern with achievement
  - Do well in school
  - Prepare for a good job
- Finding and attracting a mate
  - Look as physically attractive as possible
  - Display a feminine personality for women
  - Display a masculine personality for men

Role Completion: (25-29) >>> (25-39)

- Increasing work involvement
  - Demonstrate competence at work
- Marriage
  - Develop marital relationship. Communication and role sharing.
  - Being attractive (to attract a mate) not as important
- Being a (good) parent
  - Biological clock for women says "now or never", but may be delayed
  - Mommy track option chosen for some women. Other women leave the paid labor force.
  - For men, parenthood means providing economically
- Being a good friend
  - Being intimate, disclosing and supportive with friend for women
  - Sharing activities for men

Table 2 - Continued

SOCIAL CLOCK FOR THE COLLEGE EDUCATED

Implications for the Self-Context

Mid-Life Crisis: (44-47) >>> (40's and 50's)

- Parental concerns less salient as children leave home
  - Allow children to be independent
- Clear signs of physical aging. Menopause for women and decline in sexual potency for men.
  - Men look for a younger lover. Want to be attractive.
  - Involvement in physical fitness activities???
- Continued work involvement or change in careers

Mellowing: (48-60) >>> (late 40's-70's)

- Career peaks
  - Find satisfaction in past career successes
  - Begin disengagement from work
  - Seek alternatives for achievement expression
- Marriage becomes more companionate
- Children are independent adults. Grandparenthood.
- Parents become debilitated or die.
  - Take care of parents (especially for women)

Table 3

PREDICTING ACHIEVEMENT BEHAVIOR AT DIFFERENT LIFE STAGES

Young Adulthood: (18-24)

- Classroom and laboratory performance
  - No reliable individual differences
- Choice of career or job area
  - More difficult careers predicted by classic achievement motivation measures.
  - Female versus male-dominated career choice predicted by type of achievement orientation (e.g. Eccles & Goff, Helmreich & Spence, Lipman-Blumen)

Role Completion: (25-29) >>> (25-39)

- Work activities
  - Overall effort predicted by classic achievement motivation and patterns of attributions for success and failure.
  - Form of work effort predicted by type of achievement orientation and by achievement vs. power needs (process vs impact)
- Parental involvement (for women)
  - Disengagement from work for parenthood predicted by measures of rechanneling of achievement into traditional female role activities (Stein & Bailey) or agentic/communal (Eccles & Goff) or other styles of achievement measures.
  - Greatest conflict between work and family roles predicted for those high in achievement motivation and belief in traditional maternal roles.